

Analysis: Increasing Instability in Zimbabwe Threatens a Return to Violence Similar to 2008.

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1. Introduction

Since 10 October, MIGS' Zimbabwe Media Monitoring reports have detailed an increasingly unstable situation in the country. The process of holding a referendum on a new constitution – a key reform mandated by the Global Political Agreement (GPA) – has been postponed to March 2012 or later after the Constitution Select Committee's (COPAC) failure to meet its September 2011 deadline. In turn, elections scheduled for March 2012 have now been pushed back to an unspecified date in late 2012 or in early 2013. The political parties comprising the inclusive government – the ZANU-PF and the two wings of the MDC, the MDC-T and MDC-N – have blamed each other for these delays. The tensions in Parliament and in negotiations over the GPA have spilled onto the streets, with outbreaks of violence between the youth groups the ZANU-PF and the MDC on the rise. The Police have taken an openly confrontational stance towards opposition parties, particularly the wing of the MDC led by Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai (MDC-T), by disrupting their scheduled rallies. The current situation in the country is reminiscent of the lead up to the June 2008 Presidential run off, arousing fears that the violence that ensued after that election will repeat itself whenever Zimbabweans next go to the polls.

2. The Current Political Situation

The words which characterize the current political situation in Zimbabwe are deadlock and delay. The ZANU-PF and the two wings of the MDC continue negotiations over the Global Political Agreement (GPA), including the drafting of a new constitution, assisted by a Facilitation Team from South Africa. The Constitution Select Committee of Parliament (COPAC) failed to meet its September 2011 deadline for coming to an agreement on the provisions of a new constitution. The ZANU-PF and the MDC-T have once more blamed each other for these delays. The constitutional drafting process has yet to begin, and a co-chairperson of COPAC recently suggested that a referendum on the new constitution might only be held between March 2012 and May 2012. These delays will likely ensure that elections are not held until late 2012 or early 2013, complicating President Mugabe's plan to hold an election in the first quarter of

2012. However, COPAC officials have reportedly been put under pressure to expedite the constitution drafting process.

The ZANU-PF Congress in December will be crucial in determining the party's strategy for forthcoming elections, as well as who the party will put forward as their leadership candidate. Senior ZANU-PF officials have publicly confirmed that Robert Mugabe will seek once again to lead the party, but domestic and diaspora media sources speculate that due to the President's age (Mugabe will be 88 in February 2012) and concerns about his health after a number of rumoured trips to Singapore and Malaysia for treatments he may be forced to step aside. New developments have also highlighted divisions within ZANU-PF, made clearer in the wake of the recent death of General Solomon Mujuru (DATE), the former ZANU-PF power broker and husband of senior vice-president Joice Mujuru, and the revelation in Wikileaks that a number of ZANU-PF officials consulted with the United States Embassy over how to end Mugabe's rule. However, if Mugabe's health does hold it is likely that the President will lead ZANU-PF into the next elections, whenever they occur.

Negotiations between the ZANU-PF and the MDC formations over the reforms outlined in the GPA are arduous. Senior ZANU-PF officials declared (DATE) that they no longer had faith in the GPA negotiations, leading to a war of words between the country's three political parties. Continued political deadlock puts into question meeting the deadlines proposed for drafting a new constitution and the implementation of other reforms necessary for free and fair elections.

3. Increasing Violence Across the Country, Crackdown Against Opposition

Political tensions between the ZANU-PF and MDC formations have erupted in recent weeks, with outbreaks of violence in major cities and districts throughout the country. In Chitungwiza, a scheduled MDC-T rally [turned violent](#) on 6 November when youth activists from the MDC-T and the ZANU-PF clashed in the streets, with riot police deployed to quell the fighting. Both sides have laid blame on the other for inciting the violence. In Harare, [police raided](#) the MDC-T headquarters on 1 November after they attempted to arrest street vendors and MDC-T supporters who were allegedly selling pirated materials. Tear gas was fired both inside and outside the building, and clashes spilled onto city blocks surrounding the building. The police have blamed the MDC-T for obstructing justice, whereas MDC-T spokespersons have suggested that the police acted on orders from senior government officials affiliated with ZANU-PF and raided the MDC-T headquarters for political reasons.

There has also been an increase in the number of farm invasions in recent weeks throughout the country, with youths alleged to be ZANU-PF militants attacking white farmers and forcing them to abandon their property and belongings. The President of the Commercial Farmer's Union, Charles Taffs,

warned on 3 November that the spike in the number of farm invasions and evictions will bring the country to a point of disaster if the government does not intervene to protect the well-being and interests of commercial farmers. A number of attacks and evictions at properties protected under bilateral agreements with European countries such as Belgium and Germany have also roiled rural areas. The increase in farm invasions, along with a stepped up campaign of property seizures by ZANU-PF youth in major cities, suggest that the government's program of land redistribution for the purposes of indigenization and national empowerment are being used as a cover for politically motivated land-grabs.

Alongside an increased number of violent clashes between the two main political parties and the spike in land invasions stands a [renewed crackdown on political freedom](#) in the country. Police have [disrupted](#) a number of scheduled MDC-T rallies in Matabeleland North, despite a High Court Order that the rallies should be allowed to proceed without police interference. The police have allegedly openly dismissed the High Court Order, and moved in, heavily armed, against rally attendees and forced the proceedings to end. Prime Minister and MDC-T leader Morgan Tsvangirai was scheduled to address many of the interrupted rallies. In nearby towns in Matabeleland North, ZANU-PF rallies were allowed to proceed without any police interference.

4. A Return to 2008?

In the Media Monitoring [report](#) for 2 November to 9 November, MIGS included articles from domestic and diaspora media outlets that expressed fear that any future election will be marred by violence, much like that staged during the June 2008 Presidential run-off. The current situation in Zimbabwe bares many similarities to the election violence of 2008, which led to over 200 Zimbabweans killed and thousands injured and displaced. Violent confrontations between the supporters of the ZANU-PF and MDC parties, particularly the MDC-T, are on the rise. The security services have cracked down on opposition parties by disrupting and banning rallies while allowing ZANU-PF rallies to proceed, effectively stymieing political freedom in the country. Compounding this increasingly unstable situation is a near breakdown of the inclusive government, which threatens the implementation of much-needed reforms through the GPA process. If these troubling trends are not addressed, particularly the increase in violence, the fears that Zimbabwe will return to the “dark days” of the 2008 election may be realized.